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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the results of a survey conducted to ascertain the attitudes of 400 employers, youth, and academic/community professionals in Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C., toward an approach to Black youth unemployment centered on the creation of jobs and training among minority businesses in selected metropolitan areas. Minority businesses blamed the apathy and demeanor of black youth themselves for their plight, while the academic/community professionals saw a direct correlation between the crisis of the black family and high unemployment among black youth. Successful minority businesses were more interested in profit than in wanting to establish effective training programs to help black youths. Conversely, community professionals emphasized that unless there is a close partnership between city governments, schools, universities and community organizations, the problem of black youth unemployment will not be solved. It is argued that attempts to solve the problem of black youth unemployment will be futile so long as black businesses have a negative, acquisitive attitude toward black youth unemployment, and a closer partnership between black business, community organizations, the black family and the schools does not exist. Furthermore, the black community must begin to look inward and develop strategies to deal with youth unemployment, beginning with the development a strong, stable, responsible, and achievement-oriented black family. (RDN)

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BLACK YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE BLACK FAMILY*

by

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INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the results of a survey that was conducted to ascertain the attitudes of 400 employers, youth, and academic/community professionals in three cities, Los Angeles, Chicago and Washington, D.C. toward a conceptual approach to Black youth unemployment centered on the creation of jobs and training among minority businesses in selected metropolitan areas. In all, 77 academics, 94 minority businesses, 150 black youth between 17-20 and 79 community professionals were interviewed. The results indicate that although the phenomenon of high unemployment among black youth is recognized, the solutions to the problem are different. The minority businesses blamed the apathy and demeanor of the black youth themselves for their plight. They did not see any correlation between broken homes and black youth unemployment. The academic/community professionals saw a direct correlation between the crisis of the black family and the high incidence of unemployment among black youth.

In addition, the survey found that the successful minority businesses were more interested in government subsidies, tax breaks, credits, etc. and the profit motive instead of wanting to establish effective and meaningful training programs to help black youths. They emphasized, however, that school curricula should be extended to include computer-based courses. Community professionals also emphasized that unless there is a close partnership between city governments, schools, universities and community organizations that the problem of black youth unemployment will not be solved.

The phenomenon of unemployment among black youth is one of the most serious and intractable socio-economic problems in the United States today. According to the Department of Labor, the unemployment rate for whites was 6.3 percent compared to 15.2 percent for blacks at the end of March 1985 with a national unemployment rate of 7.3 percent. Indeed unofficial figures indicate that black youth unemployment is as high as 40-60 percent in some metropolitan cities. Bad work attitudes are sometimes posited as the raison d'etre for black youth unemployment. The non-existence of closer collaboration between the private and public sectors is also emphasized. What has often been left out of this unemployment equation is the attitudes of minority businesses and community organizations (including the churches) toward black youth unemployment and the creation of training programs for black youth. This paper argues that as long as black businesses have a negative and acquisitive attitude toward black youth unemployment and that there does not exist a closer partnership between this sector, community organizations, the black family and the schools, then attempts to solve the problem of black youth unemployment would tantamount to an exercise in futility. The paper also argues that the black community must begin to look in-ward and develop strategies to deal with this problem. The starting gate should be the development of a strong, stable, responsible, and achievement - oriented black family.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Academics

Q*: What role should minority businesses play in alleviating black youth unemployment?

R**: 59.7% said Hire more black youth
20.8% " Establish on-the-job-training
2.6% " Pay sub-minimum wage to black youth
18.2% " All of the Above
1.3% " None of the Above

Q: Do you think schools are doing enough to prepare black youths to become employable?

R: 10.4% replied Yes
68.8% " No
11.7% " Don't Know
9.1% " No Opinion

Q: What should schools do to prepare black youth to be employable?

R: 13.0% said emphasize more technical and computer skills
22.1% " rigid graduation requirements
23.4% " more career related programs
7.8% " stress analytical thinking
2.6% " closer co-operation with business
2.6% " stress positive attitudes of students.
22.1% " no opinion

*Q = Question asked

Q: Do you think minority businesses have been responsive to the task of solving the problem of black youth unemployment?

R: 24.7% said Yes
44.2% " No
28.6% " No opinion
1.3% " do not know
1.3% " refused to answer

Q: What do you regard as the most important cause of black youth unemployment?

R: 23.0% said inadequate education
20.8% " lack of training
18.2% " race/sex discrimination
15.6% " lack of motivation on the part of the black youth
14.3% " insufficient jobs available
7.8% " no opinion

Q: What is your solution for alleviating the high incidence of unemployment among the black youth?

R: 29.9% replied generate more job-search-training programs
28.6% " more education
20.8% " close government-business-community effort

Q: Should government provide tax breaks to minority businesses to train black youth?

R: 77.9% replied Yes
5.2% " No
14.3% " No opinion
2.6% " No answer

Q: What should black youth receive while in training programs?

R: 22.1% replied minimum wage

18.2% " sub-minimum wage

6.5% " depends on service
13.0 % " enough for miscellaneous expenses
39.6 % " no answer
1.2 % " don't know

In addition:

- 58.4% stated that minority businesses should provide more skills-career programs.
- 67.5% suggested that minority businesses should train high school graduates instead of college graduates.
- 43.0% felt that there were social and psychological factors affecting the work attitude of black youths.
- 28.0% said that emphasis should be placed on creating incentives for black youth to stay in school.
- 22.0% advised that schools should assist/consult with single family parent households.

Minority Businesses:

Q: How much schooling should a black youth have to be considered employable?

R: 23.4% replied high school education

34.0% " high school and trade school education

17.0% " some college education

Q: What benefits should minority businesses receive from the government to hire black youths?

R: 45.7% replied tax breaks
20.6% " loans/credits
38.3% " subsidies

Q: What has been the attitude of black youths that you have hired toward work?

R: 16.0% replied eager to work
33.0% " somewhat eager to work
22.3% " apathetic
20.2% " somewhat apathetic

Q: What advice would you give the Reagan administration to solve this problem?

R: 18.1% said subsidize job-training programs
23.4% " establish job-training-placement programs
22.3% " create more jobs
11.7% " closer cooperation between business and labor

Q: What is your assessment of the present training programs?

R: 4.3% said good
8.5% " moderate
72.3% " poor
13.8% " no opinion

Q: What is your assessment of minority business attitude toward black youth employment?

R: 25.5% said good
38.3% " indifferent
26.6% " sympathetic
9.6% " no opinion

Q: What do you see as the most important cause of black youth unemployment?

R: 20.2% replied inadequate education
13.8% " insufficient job information
18.1% " racial discrimination
27.7% " lack of training experience

Q: Who do you think is responsible for the high rate of unemployment among black youth?

R: 9.6% replied private sector
17.6% " public sector
66.0% " both
3.2% " no opinion

In addition:

- 77.7% felt that there was a direct relationship between black youth unemployment and broken black families.
- 11.7% were not willing to hire black youth.

- 48.9% said that black youths need more technical training.
- 27.7% of the minority business interviewed operated training programs for black youth.
- 83.0% said that government should provide the funds for training programs.

Community Professionals:

Q: What kinds of problems with young people, ages 17-20, do you encounter most frequently in the performance of your job?

R: 24.3% replied unemployment
12.9% " alcohol
7.1% " drug abuse
11.4% " poor attitude
10.0% " family problems

Q: What is your reaction/attitude toward the black unemployed youth?

R: 68.6% replied positive
10.0% " negative
8.6% " neutral
12.9% " no reaction

Q: What is the most important cause of black youth unemployment?

R: 22.9% said lack of training and experience
20.0% " insufficient jobs
14.3% " inadequate education
11.4% " lack of job information

In addition:

- 58.6% of the community professionals stated that employment opportunities for black youth are poor.
- 88.6% said that community services are not adequate enough to help black youths.
- 24.3% suggested that businesses should hire more part-time youths.
- 62.9% indicated that more training programs should be established.
- 45.7% stated that schools and churches should establish programs to provide black youths with skills.
- 40.0% said that schools and churches should assist/consult with poor and single parent families.
- 61.3% felt that there is a direct relation between broken families and black youth unemployment.

Youth:

Q: What is your marital status?

R: 95.1% said single
2.6% " separated
2.0% " married

Q: With whom are you currently living?

5.3% said on my own
74.3% " with parents
7.2% " with relatives
11.2% " with room-mate

Q: When you were growing up who assumed the father role in your household?

R: 64.5% replied own father
2.6% " grandfather
7.2% " step father
4.6% " brother
0.7% " uncle
2.6% " other relative
15.1% " no one

Q: What was the work experience of this person?

R: 63.8% replied worked full-time
12.5% " worked full-time for some periods
2.6% " usually worked part-time
3.3% " unemployed or laid-off
0.7% " did not know
17.1% " did not answer

Q: What was the job-title this person did?

R: 30.3% replied person worked as laborer or service oriented jobs
14.5% " person was professional
1.3% " person was educator/teacher
4.6 % " person was executive
3.3 % " person was in military
6.6 % " person was craftman/mechan[illegible]/electrician
2.0 % " person was retired
4.6 % " do not know
3.3% " person was proprietor
29.5% " refused to answer question

Q: What was that person's income?

R: 3.3% said under $ 3,000
5.3% " $ 4,000 - $ 7,999
0.7% " $ 8,000 - $11,999
6.6% " $12.000 - $15,999
7.2% " $16,000 - $23,999
8.6% " $24,000 - $27,999
2.6% " $28,000 - $31,999
3.9% " $32,000 - $35,999
1.3% " $36,000 - $39,999
8.6% " Over $40,000

Q: When you were growing up who assumed the mother role in your household?

R: 92.1% said own mother
2.0% " grandmother
2.0% " step mother
1.3% " sister
0.7% " aunt

Q: What was the income of this person?

R: 11.8% said under $ 3,999
6.6% " $4,000 - $ 7,999
5.9% " $8,000 - $11,999
7.2% " $12,000 - $15,999
9.2% " $16,000 - $23,999
6.6% " $24,000 - $27,999

R: 4.6% said $27,000 - $31,000
1.3% " $32,000 - $35,999
3.3% " $36,000 - $39,999
3.3% " over $40,000

Q: What kinds of grades do/did you make in school?

R: 11.8% said mostly A's
46.7% " " B's
39.5% " " C's
2.0% " " D's

Q: How satisfied are/were you with the education you received in school?

R: 22.4% said completely satisfied
57.2% " somewhat satisfied
16.4% " somewhat dissatisfied
3.9% " completely dissatisfied

Q: What is the highest grade you completed in school?

R: 25.7% said 8th to 11th grade
17.9% " below 8th grade
38.2% " High school diploma
25.0% " College credits

Q: What did you like least about school?

R: 9.2% said teachers' attitude
15.8% " subject matter of courses
2.6% " Classmates/peers
3.3% " rules/red tape
13.2% " hours
12.5% " amount of work
5.3% " disruptive element

Q: What did you like best about school?

R: 34.9% said learning challenge
11.2% " meeting new people
5.9% " extra curricula activities
3.9% " nothing

In addition:

- 76.3% of the youths interviewed worked for three months or less during summer; 46.1% were satisfied with their jobs, 17.8% were not and 36.2% had no opinion; only 3.3% said they worked to gain a sense of independence; 17.1% worked to support themselves and family; 57.2% worked to support parents and other relatives.
- 73.7% did not know what their future plans were; only .3% stated that higher education was in their future plans.
- 46.7% lived in single parent family homes.

Analysis of Findings: Crisis in the Black Family

The results of this study point to a very dismal and bleak future for the black youth and by extension the unity/cohesion of the black family. The observation should be made that unless minority businesses change their attitude toward training black youths then the situation would be compounded. It is indeed a sad omen that with the Reagan administration insisting that the government should get off the backs of the public that minority businesses

should elect to adopt such an attitude toward the black youth. In addition, with the academic community adopting similar attitudes then the black youth seems to be in a no-win situation. The only solution rests with a closer collaboration between the churches, community organizations and the black family. As the study shows, there is an accepted and recognizable relation between black youth unemployment and the black family orientation. The crisis in the black family is therefore manifested in the apathy of the black youth toward work. This would suggest that programs and strategies should be created to forge linkage between the family and schools and the community in order to engender a more positive attitude of the black youth toward work. Parents should be instructed by example to instill positive work attitudes in their youth but this goal cannot and would not be achieved as long as teachers/ academics these same black youths encounter do not care about them and their future. Indeed the survey has revealed that students liked the contents of their courses and teachers the least and that teachers, though they were convinced that present curriculum was doing a dis-service to the black youth, yet like the minority businesses they were not prepared to do anything substantial to remedy the situation. Unless black youths are in a familial environment in which they can receive a positive image/concept of themselves then their present negative and apathetic attitude toward work would be very detrimental to the building of strong, stable black families.

Moreover, the crisis in the black family is sadly reflected in the survey results which show that 2.6% of the youth's marital status at that young age (17-20 years) is separated while 2.0% is married. Needless to say, lack of income, which results from unemployment, is the primary cause of the separation among the young black married couple. And since all indication shows that unemployment would be a permanent and intractable problem among these black youth, then we might be tempted to arrive at the perverbial conclusion (with some degree of certitude) - there goes the black family. The crisis is further compounded by the staggering realities that 46.7% of the youth surveyed was living in single parent family households and that the mother figure was much more dominant than the father figure. In fact, 15.1% of the youth indicated that they had no one to perform the father role when they were growing up. And if we add the fact that the person who did perform the father role had low work experience and hence was not a positive role model, then it is no small wonder that the black youth has such an apathetic attitude toward work as the employers themselves have stated.

Indeed the crisis is sadly reflected further by the fact that 11.2% of the youth elected to live with a room-mate, while 5.3% chose to live on their own. This so-called or perceived 'independence' has not solved the problem.

Finally, no analysis of the relationship between black youth unemployment and the crisis in the black family would be complete without plugging into the equation the policies of the Reagan administration. This administration is the worst and most vicious to come down the pike in recent memory in terms of policies that affect the poor and minority. In his 1986 budget request to Congress Reagan is lifting the burden of "big government tyranny" off the backs of the taxpayers by cutting/slashing social programs such as health care, job training, education (i.e. cutting $2.3 billion in Federal loan guarantees to students), public transit, and food subsidies to the bone. All this is done to "keep America strong". In his 1986 budget request which Reagan calls "a second American revolution of hope and opportunity", he is demanding $32 billion increase in military spending over last year at the same time that he is slashing $30 billion from domestic programs that benefit the poor and minority. In fact, while the military bill has increased 120% over the past four years, the Reagan administration has cut programs serving the poor by $57 billion. And after examining the 1981 Reagan administration budget cuts, the Urban Institute was compelled to conclude that

> the average black family lost more than three times as much as the average white family, while the average Latino family lost twice as much as whites....

This conclusion was also corroborated by the National Urban Coalition in its detailed study on conditions in urban America.

According to the study "black families in many cities continue to be afflicted by poverty, unemployment, and infant mortality at twice the rate of whites". Indeed poverty has become far more concentrated in central, metropolitan cities over the last two decades, particularly among blacks to the extent that

> ....We are creating very, very dangerous powderkegs in the cities (where) young minorities are outside the system, outside the workforce, outside the reach of education and training largely because of the combined impact of the recession and Reaganomics....

We are therefore forced to conclude that with four more years of this administration's policies that not only will unemployment continue to be high among blacks but this combination will impact negatively on the black family.

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